

Southeastern Yearly Meeting

Quakers in Florida, southeast Georgia & coastal South Carolina

Epistle 2022

Loving Greetings to Friends Everywhere.

The Southeastern Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends met for our Annual Gathering at Warren Willis Conference Center, Fruitland Park, Florida, Fourth Month, 13th through 17th, 2022,

Our theme this year, “Welcome as You Are”, was highlighted by our youth – in chalk – on the auditorium entry sidewalk, as we gathered.

Good weather facilitated outdoor activities and we welcomed being back together for the first in-person gathering in two years.

Offering Hybrid Meetings for the first time posed challenges but allowed Friends to join us virtually. Meetings for Business, Worship Sharing, and the Walton Lecture, were available for distant Friends, while those attending in person were required to present vaccination records upon registration, and to wear masks indoors, and distance appropriately.

Sixty-five adults and 12 youth attended in person, and 34 registered to join us online.

In keeping with our theme, intergenerational events included several workshops intended for all ages, and there was a well-attended and diverse Friday night talent show. Cooperative help from parents gave assistance to youth leaders throughout the Gathering.

We presented a robust youth program, ages 8 through high school were with us, though no children younger than eight attended.

We brought with us concerns for state, national, and world events and legislation, and these remained in our minds as we endeavored to step back a bit from these, and to breathe into the Light of Spirit. We approved a minute to strongly recommend resistance to the recent laws passed by the current Florida legislature. The minute is as follows:

22YM05 We are advised, as members of the Religious Society of Friends, of the truth to reach out to that of God in everyone. We endeavor to live out our testimonies in expected and unexpected circumstances of daily life, living in love and learning from one another.

Florida’s recently enacted “Don’t Say Gay” bill, the transgender youth medical care ban, the license to discriminate in health care bill, and the proposed “Stop Woke Act,” are not in unity with our testimonies. This legislation does not come from a place of love, and it inhibits opportunities to learn from one another and puts us in a position of vulnerability because of our practice and call to eliminate ignorance.

SEYM urges Friends to be bold in expressing opposition to this legislation that will deny the right of gender-questioning youth access to compassionate counseling and medical

care and prohibits educators from teaching anything about America's past or present which causes discomfort to any student.

Compliance with these laws will seriously inhibit the possibility of love, truth, and reconciliation which are prerequisites to attaining a just society of equals. For this reason, we call Friends and all Floridians to refuse to comply with these laws and to support the organizations, teachers, and physicians who choose to act in opposition to these laws.

APPROVED AS REVISED

Workshops were presented on racial justice, aging and dying well, mystics and laughter, one with our Field Secretary on Earthcare, and one with Friends Committee on National Legislation (which updated us on lobbying and issues in Washington DC), Bible study on The Sermon on the Mount, Spiritual Nurture for Friends, LGBTQ+ concerns, and several other offerings were also included.

Our Walton lecturers, Windy Cooler, of Baltimore Yearly Meeting, and Melinda Wenner Bradley, of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, presented an excellent workshop on welcoming families to our Meetings, and also presented two retreats in which we were encouraged to express that which was in our hearts.

In the Walton Lecture, Friends Windy and Melinda shared reflections on gifts that contribute to family and communities and how we can nurture ourselves and each other.

Our Gathering included activities we have traditionally had at yearly meeting, and some new activities such as Extended Worship, as well as the new challenges that Hybrid Meetings present. We regret being unable to offer the full content of the Gathering to our virtual participants this year but look forward to future in-person gatherings as pandemic conditions ideally continue to ease.

Blessings and Peace to you all, in the Light.
Southeastern Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends